

## **Testimony of Ruby Tooks**

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the chairman and committee for allowing me to share the special "end of life" story of my mother Louise Tharpe. If you remember one thing from my short visit with you today, I hope you will understand the dramatic difference hospice care has made in my life, that of my mother and the incredible support of a special group of healthcare professionals.

Less than one month ago, on August 20<sup>th</sup>, my mother -- and my best friend -- passed away on her own terms. Hospice care provided by VITAS Healthcare Corp. in Dade County, Florida, has made all the difference in how my family and I have accepted the loss of not one but both my parents. Yes, BOTH of my parents. My father also died eight months ago on hospice care. Today, it is because of hospice's support that I can reflect on the many precious moments I shared with my mother during her final days. Because of those fond memories, I have the strength to be here today before you talking about what hospice means to me.

To each person in this room, hospice may have a different meaning. To me, when asked, "what is hospice care," I simply say it is "the answer." It is the answer to care at the end of a loved one's life. When all control is gone and final decisions have to be made, there is hospice to support you and your family.

Hospice was a "god send" for myself, my family and most important, my mother. Mother loved her hospice caregivers. She loved the control she maintained in her life up until the very end. It was hospice that made it possible for her to spend more time than expected at home surrounded by her family and friends. For that time, she was truly blessed and I know she would want me to thank VITAS and all of you for the benefit that made it possible.

Alone, I doubt my family would have been able to accomplish her last wishes. It would have taken all of my family's resources, and still most likely not been enough. I am so grateful that we were able to have hospice with us for more than a couple of days. With the care of hospice, I was able to give back to the woman who sat up with me at night when I was sick, kissed my bumps and bruises to make them better and soothed my heartache when the world seemed unfair.

The early involvement of hospice in both my parents' lives allowed us the extra time to develop a special trust and confidence in the hospice staff. Everyone on the hospice care team was so wonderful. Whenever needed, the hospice physician, Dr. Gomez, actually visited my mother at home in Carol City, Florida. The nurse and nursing aides helped me with the day-to-day care of my mother so I could focus the needed attention on my husband who suffers from chronic diabetes and needs dialysis treatments. The chaplain and social worker also helped us with the stress and uncertainty that comes with a terminal illness. All of this provided great comfort and support to both myself and my mother. And for that, I am truly grateful.

The assistance that was given - and is currently ongoing - for my family is wonderful. Many times in life, my mother was my strength and I was glad I could support her up until the end. The support of hospice and my church has made all the difference. Hospice care helped us appreciate each day that mother was with us. And in the end, they spared not only my mother's pain but softened our loss.

As you can tell, I believe hospice is wonderful. It allows me to live and appreciate each day in a special way. In fact, with my new understanding of hospice, I plan on volunteering to assist VITAS with their wonderful work in the future. Hospice is the answer to end-of-life care and dying on your own terms. More people should know about hospice. Hospice isn't just for cancer patients. And hospice workers

won't turn their back on you if you live longer than predicted. I think my mother lived longer because hospice managed not only her physical pain but also her emotional care so well. Regardless of the outcome and time frame, hospice workers are committed until the end because hospice is a special way of caring. Hospice is about dying well.

Thank you for letting me share my story.